

DA'AT TEVUNOT - SECTION 7: CHAPTER 11

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

1. Though they were privileged to observe so much about the workings of this world, there were a couple of especially stunning and fundamental phenomena that the prophets nonetheless couldn't observe: the act of creation, and the reality of the World to Come.

We'd discussed the World to Come a number of times before in this work , so we'll now offer Ramchal's view on the issue of creation ex nihilo (i.e., the fact that G-d had everything derive out of sheer nothingness). This is in fact the last subject of Da'at Tevunot in this, its final chapter.

2. There are a number of befuddling things to consider when it comes to this, though. Let's begin with what we'll never know: how G-d created the world, i.e., His process. That's utterly beyond us. (After all, He would have used pre-creation processes and means which, by definition, are beyond our realm and experience.) All we can begin to know is "what He worked on, and in what order", Ramchal offers (since both the phenomena involved and the order in which they came about were all post-creational).

That having been said he then offers that the actual substance that G-d created was utterly and fundamentally new. That raises a thorny question though: doesn't the fact that something utterly new came about indicate a change in G-d's mind, so to speak? Doesn't it suggest that while at one point G-d only allowed for pre-creation but He then decided to turn the corner and allow for post-creational matter? But we're told that "G--d ... is not human, so He does not change his mind" (Numbers 23:19).

Ramchal's response is that G-d didn't "change His mind" whatsoever. He always had it in mind to create the cosmos, but He only actually brought it about at the point when He decided to. Thus, creation existed before creation, but didn't come into play until G-d decided it would and set the process "in gear", if you will.

As to the ordering of things which we can grasp, Ramchal offers that the first "gears" that G-d set in place were decidedly sublime and beyond our ken, but that the downward chain of them that came into play one after the other were less and less sublime, and more and more along the lines of processes we could understand. They're termed His "emanations" and they are the means by which G-d interacts with the universe (which we discussed in great detail in this work) .

Note:

See 2: 3, 4, 10-11; 4:7; 6:4-5, etc.

For Kabbalistic references see R' Goldblatt's notes 1, 11, and 13 as well as notes 90-91 on p. 491 of his edition, and R' Shriki's notes 185-186 (as well as his short introduction to this chapter).

Rabbi Yaakov Feldman has translated and commented upon "The Gates of Repentance", "The Path of the Just", and "The Duties of the Heart" (Jason Aronson Publishers). His works are available in bookstores and in various locations on the Web.